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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTANI BORDER GUARDS EAGER FOR INL-SUPPORTED OSCE TRAINING

¶1. Sensitive but unclassified. Not for internet distribution.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: DCM, INL chief and Legatt visited Uralsk, the capital of the Western Kazakhstan oblast (region). While in Uralsk, the DCM and INL chief dedicated an INL-funded Border Guard training facility. Following Soviet tradition, the Border Guards are a military wing of the Committee for National Security (KNB), the direct descendent of the KGB. At the facility, the OSCE, UNHCR and other international organizations were conducting well-received training in basic border management, which includes international standards for the treatment of border crossers, including refugees. In general, the Border Guards have been eager to cooperate with Western organizations. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (SBU) Uralsk is an old city by Kazakhstani standards, with a history dating to the 18th century, when it was a Cossack trading post on the border with Central Asia. The city still has a strong Russian colonial flavor with numerous small wooden houses painted bright blue, green or left natural, with contrasting painted shutters. A persistent Russian cultural influence was evident at a local Orthodox church, where DCM observed an elderly woman praying to and kissing an icon of the murdered Tsar Nicholas II and his family. Local residents also proudly related their link to Russian history and highlighted visits to Uralsk by Pushkin and Tolstoy. Kazakhs are from the lesser (Western) juz but rarely is the Kazakh language heard on the streets. In other ways, however, Uralsk is a typical modern Kazakhstani city. The city square has newly-constructed office buildings of equal size for the city administration (Mazlihat), the Western Kazakhstan governor's office (Akimat), and Nur Otan (President Nazarbayev's political party). The latter two are separate buildings connected by a breezeway for convenience of access.

¶4. (SBU) A review of the border history of Uralsk was particularly appropriate, since the primary purpose of the visit was to inaugurate an INL-renovated training center for the Border Guards. This is the second INL-funded training center at a Border Guard base. The Border Guards are part of the Committee for National Security (KNB), the Kazakhstani direct descendent of the soviet KGB.

The Border Guards are enthusiastic about cooperation with the United States and other Western partners. The first training course, which launched the opening of the center, featured training by the OSCE, EU, International Organization for Migration (IOM), and UNHCR. The goal of the course was to increase the professionalism of the Border Guards, by getting them to focus on protecting the

rights of individuals while preventing the transit of contraband (drugs, trafficked persons, materials that could be used for creating weapons of mass destruction).

¶15. (SBU) Durman Yelmesov, a young major in command of the Uralsk border post, is enthusiastic about cooperation with Western partners. He and Colonel Akmetov, who is in charge of the anti-drug office in Astana, joked how wherever Yelmesov went he established training centers. They both asked for additional training in all aspects of detecting contraband and convicting smugglers. Conversations with the OSCE, UNHCR, EU, and IOM confirmed the Border Guards' enthusiasm for training, including courses on the rights of citizens and refugees. Kazakhstan's record of protecting refugees has been impressive on most of its borders. However, there are still political issues with China that prevent Kazakhstan from admitting Uyghurs.

¶16. (SBU) The apparent liberalism of the Border Guards officers, however, was not unlimited. IOM had encouraged the Border Guards to have the press at the opening of the training course. After initially indicating support, the base commander subsequently decided to issue a press release and not have reporters present at the event. He explained that he could not allow the press into the training site since it was a "sensitive military zone." The DCM later explained to the commander that only by opening to the media could the Border Guards improve its image of service to the public. Neither officer objected to this point.

¶17. (SBU) In addition, during this visit the Legatt conducted an interview with an officer from the Kazakhstani Agency for Combating Economic Crimes and Corruption (aka Financial Police) to attend training at the FBI National Academy. Post anticipates that this

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January, the first Kazakhstani law enforcement official will begin long-term training in the United States. This will add to the approximately 175 Kazakhstani officers already trained at the International Law Enforcement Academy in Hungary.

¶18. (SBU) Just before departure, the DCM, INL officer and Legatt attended a standing-room only discussion of the U.S. presidential elections at the Uralsk American Corner. The questions from the largely student crowd were well-informed and positive. One student asked why the Peace Corps had withdrawn its volunteers from Uralsk and said that the Peace Corps was missed. The answer was that due to the distance from Peace Corps headquarters in Almaty, resource limitations prevented the Peace Corps from supporting volunteers in Western Kazakhstan and the Caspian region. It was clear that the students present had a strong desire for western and specifically American contacts.

¶19. (SBU) COMMENT: Embassy cooperation with the Border Guards has been excellent and is well-documented (septel). It was surprising, however, to find the Border Guards also eager to cooperate with OSCE, UNHCR and other international organizations. In general, the citizens of western Kazakhstan, an area visited less frequently than the Caspian region, seemed eager to meet Americans and were positive in their outlook toward the United States. One problem for the population seemed to be access to the world from their isolated location on Russia's southern border. Internet access is rare and slow. The sites where public internet stations were available were very heavily used. The presence of the American Corner offered one of the few windows on the world outside of Kazakhstan and Russia.
END COMMENT.

MILAS